



BATMAN

431
MAR 89
US 75¢
CAN 95¢



GEORGE PRATT



by
**OWSLEY,
APARO &
De CARLO**

The Wall

THE PAKTU-SAN MOUNTAINS,
NORTH KOREA.

TEN YEARS
AGO.

JAMES
OWSLEY
writer

JIM
APARO
penciller

MIKE
DECARLO
inker

JOHN
COSTANZA
letterer

ADRIENNE
ROY
colorist

DAN
RASPLER
asst. editor

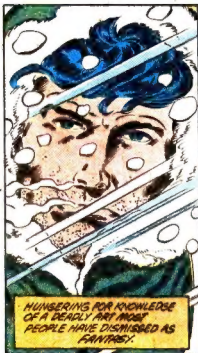
DENNY
O'NEIL
editor

BOB
KANE
creator

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HE'S SPENT SEVERAL DAYS
COMBING THIS AREA IN
SEARCH OF A LEGEND.



HUNGERING FOR KNOWLEDGE
OF A DEADLY ART MOST
PEOPLE HAVE DISMISSED AS
FANTASY.



BUT HE KNOWS BETTER.



THESE KNIVES MUST BE ROTATED
IN A SPECIFIC SEQUENCE.

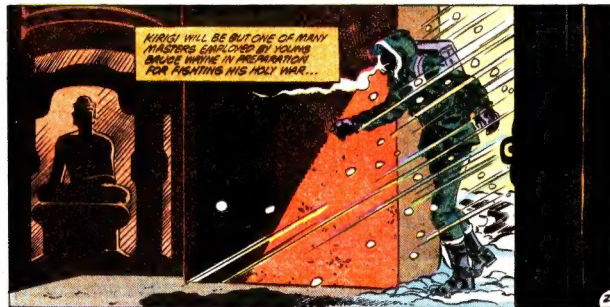


HE FALLS TWICE.

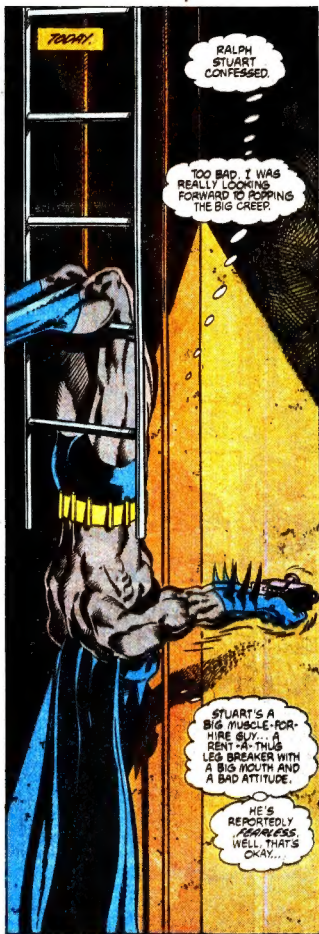


KK-KLACK

THERE.



KIRIGI WILL BE BUT ONE OF MANY
MASTERS EMPLOYED BY YOUNG
BRUCE WAYNE IN PREPARATION
FOR FIGHTING HIS HOLY WAR...



TOO BAD.

RALPH
STUART
CONFERRED.

TOO BAD. I WAS
REALLY LOOKING
FORWARD TO POPPING
THE BIG CREEP.

STUART'S A
BIG MUSCLE-FOR-
HIRE GUY... A
RENT-A-THUG
LEG BREAKER WITH
A BIG MOUTH AND
A BAD ATTITUDE.

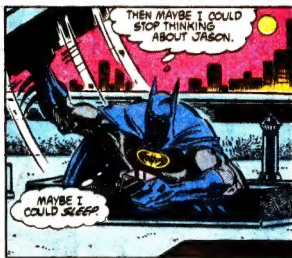
HE'S
REPORTEDLY
FEARLESS.
WELL, THAT'S
OKAY...



...SO AM I.

I'VE KEPT ~~THIS~~ ON
HIS PHONE FOR WEEKS.
I WAS HOPING TO FIND
HIM ~~DIRTY~~.

I WAS HOPING TO
FIND A ~~PERSON~~ TO
SLAM MR. NO FEAR
AROUND A BIT.



THEN MAYBE I COULD
STOP THINKING
ABOUT JASON.

MAYBE I
COULD SLEEP.



BUT, STUART TURNED HIMSELF
IN A FEW DAYS AGO. CONFERRED
TO A LITANY OF DIRTY TRICKS.

BLAST.

SOME DAYS
YOU JUST
CAN'T GET A
BREAK.



DAWN, AT WAYNE MANOR...

TRANSCRIBE
THESE TAPES FOR
ME, ALFRED.



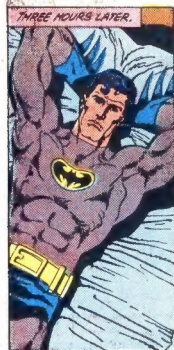
NO RUSH. I CAN'T NAIL THIS
GUY ANYWAY. HE NAILED
HIMSELF.

MASTER
BRUCE...

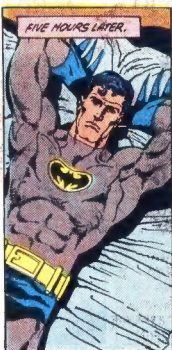


...MIGHT I SUGGEST
YOU GET SOME
SLEEP?

YOU
MIGHT
SUGGEST.



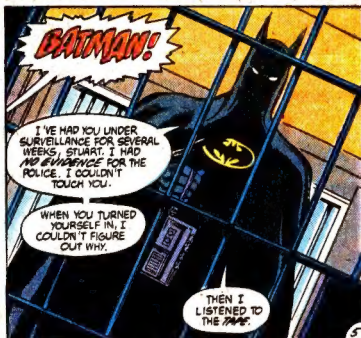
THREE HOURS LATER.

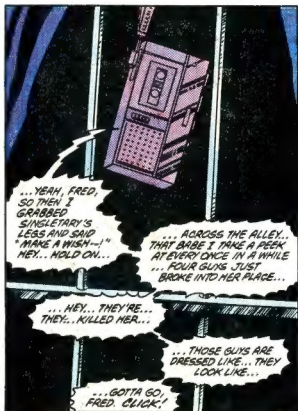


FIVE HOURS LATER.



I HATE TO INTERRUPT
YOUR REST, SIR, BUT
THERE'S SOMETHING
VERY DISTURBING ON
ONE OF THESE TAPES...







623 HOLLER STREET.
LATER THAT NIGHT...

AND JUST WHAT DO
YOU THINK YOU'RE
DOING?

WHO WANTS
TO KNOW?

I'M IN *8PM*. MY
SINK'S BEEN
BACKED UP FOR
A WEEK!

HEY, LADY, I ONLY
GOT TWO HANDS!
I'LL GET TO IT!

INSIDE THE
APARTMENT...

ANY
ALARMS?

NONE,
SIR.

FINE, WE
OWN IT.

TANJA LLOYD,
FEMALE CAUC, AGE 29.
LEGAL SECRETARY, DIVORCED,
FIVE FOOT SIX, BROWN HAIR
AND EYES.

THAT'S AS FAR AS
WE CAN GO WITH THE
LANDLORD'S RECORDS
AND THE *D.M.V.*

THE *ASP* HAS NEARLY TWO
DOZEN JANE DOES ON THEIR
COMPUTER WHO FIT LLOYD'S
DESCRIPTION, ALL OF WHOM
SHOWED UP IN THE LAST
COUPLE OF DAYS.

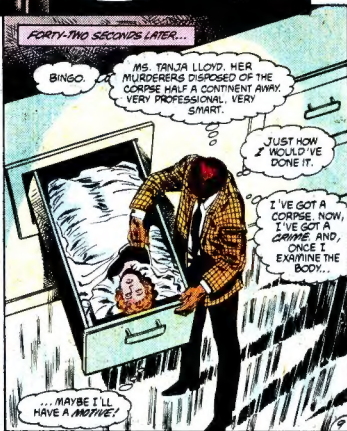
I NEED MS. LLOYD'S
APARTMENT TO TELL ME
WHICH OF THOSE CORPSES
BELONGS TO HER.

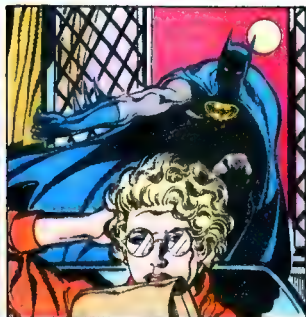
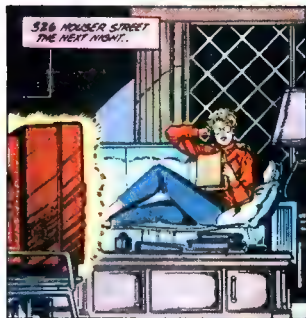
SHE'S GOT A
BAD BACK.
SLEEPS ON
A BOARD.

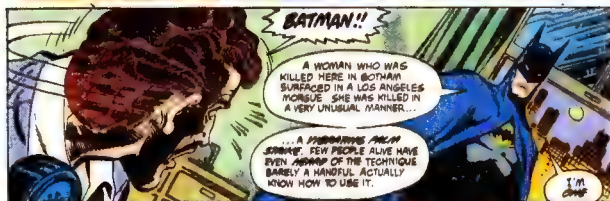
SHE'S GOT GOOD TEETH. FLOSSES
REGULARLY. HER SHOE HEELS
ARE WORN AT ANGLES, MAKE HER
A BIT PIGEON-TOED.

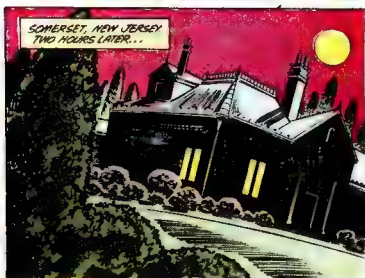
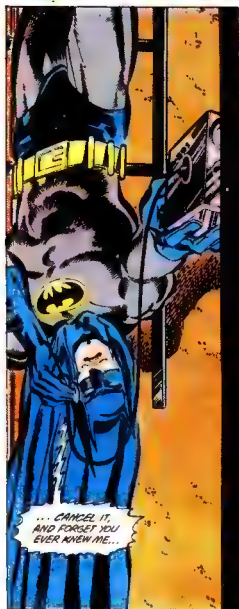


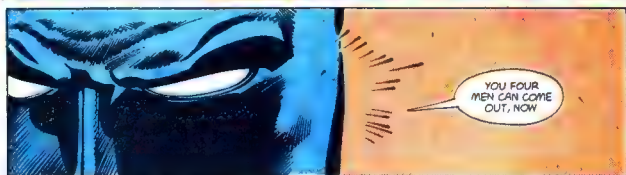
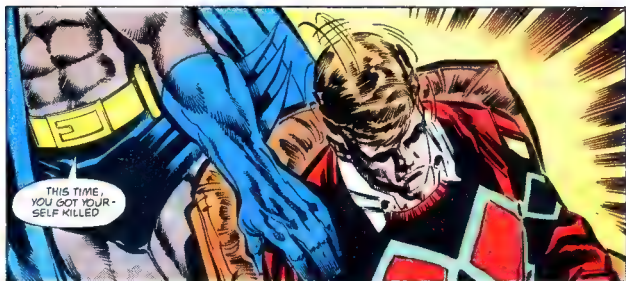
LOS ANGELES, SEVERAL HOURS LATER...



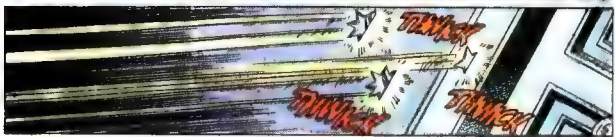
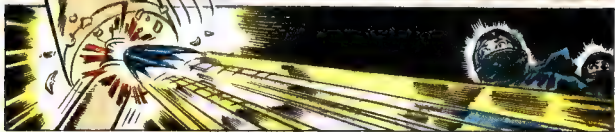
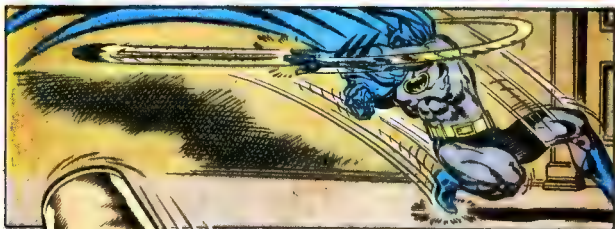
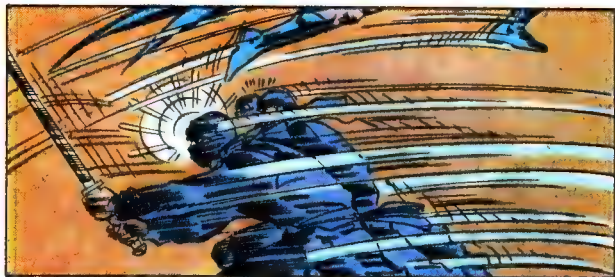




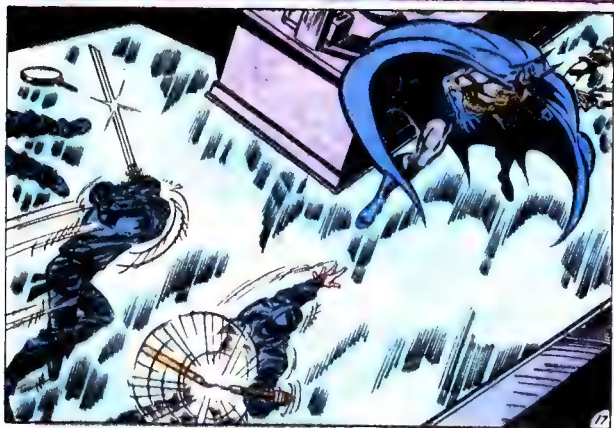
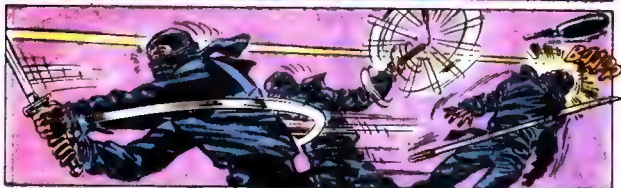
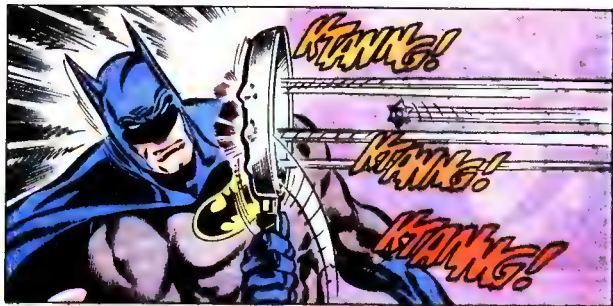


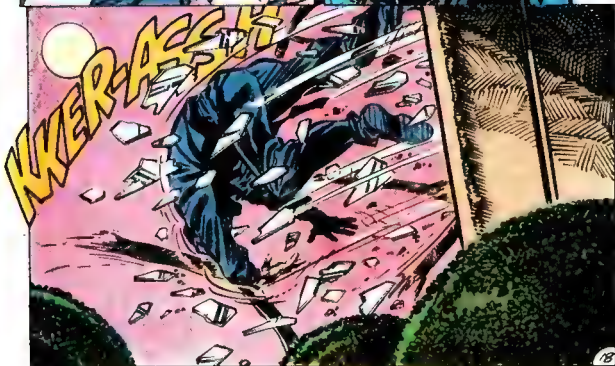


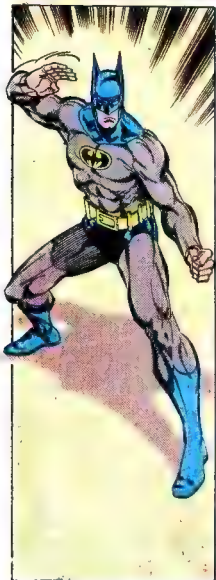
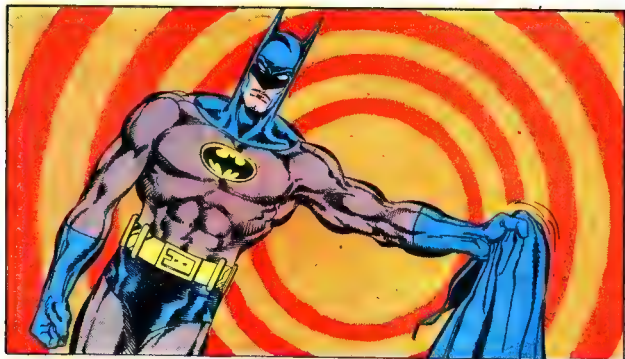


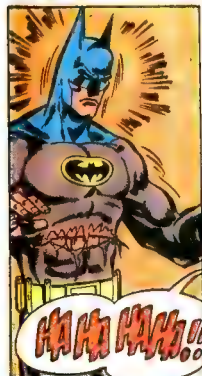
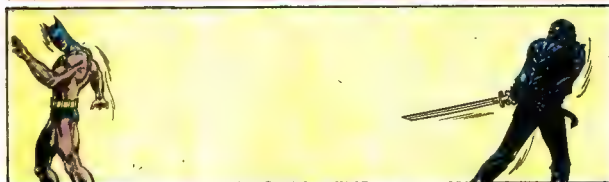
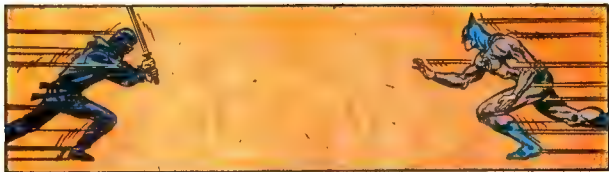


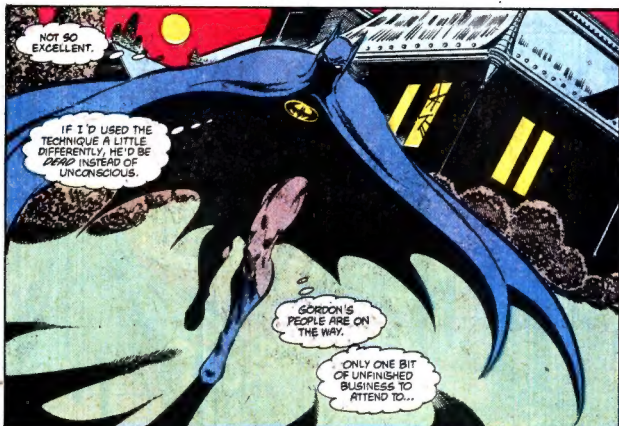










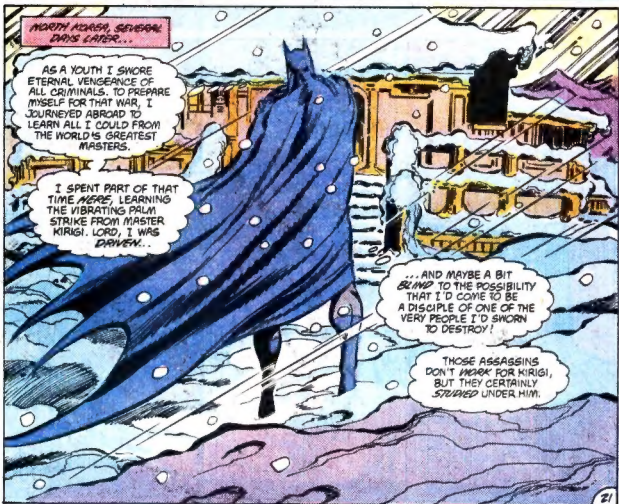


NOT SO
EXCELLENT.

IF I'D USED THE
TECHNIQUE A LITTLE
DIFFERENTLY, HE'D BE
DEAD INSTEAD OF
UNCONSCIOUS.

GORDON'S
PEOPLE ARE ON
THE WAY.

ONLY ONE BIT
OF UNFINISHED
BUSINESS TO
ATTEND TO...



NORTH KANSAS, SEVERAL
DAYS LATER...

AS A YOUTH I SWORE
ETERNAL VENGEANCE OF
ALL CRIMINALS. TO PREPARE
MYSELF FOR THAT WAR, I
JOURNEYED ABROAD TO
LEARN ALL I COULD FROM
THE WORLD'S GREATEST
MASTERS.

I SPENT PART OF THAT
TIME ~~HERE~~, LEARNING
THE VIBRATING PALM
STRIKE FROM MASTER
KIRIGI. LORD, I WAS
DRIVEN...

...AND MAYBE A BIT
~~BLIND~~ TO THE POSSIBILITY
THAT I'D COME TO BE
A DISCIPLE OF ONE OF THE
VERY PEOPLE I'D SWORN
TO DESTROY!

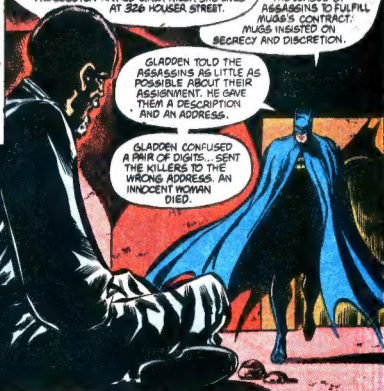
THOSE ASSASSINS
DON'T ~~WORK~~ FOR KIRIGI,
BUT THEY CERTAINLY
STUDIED UNDER HIM.



SOMETHING'S GOT TO BE DONE ABOUT THAT.

IN GOTHAM CITY THERE'S A MOBSTER NAMED MUSS CLIFFORD WHO'S BEEN INDICTED ON RACKETEERING CHARGES. THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE IS BEING SPEARHEADED BY A FEDERAL PROSECUTOR NAMED LINDA RILEY. SHE LIVES AT 326 HOUSER STREET.

MUSS WANTED HER DEAD. HE CONTACTED THADDEUS GLADDEN WHO IN TURN HIRED THE LEAGUE OF ASSASSINS TO FULFILL MUSS'S CONTRACT. MUSS INSISTED ON SECRECY AND DISCRETION.



GLADDEN TOLD THE ASSASSINS AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE ABOUT THEIR ASSIGNMENT. HE GAVE THEM A DESCRIPTION AND AN ADDRESS.

GLADDEN CONFUSED A PAIR OF DIGITS... SENT THE KILLERS TO THE WRONG ADDRESS. AN INNOCENT WOMAN DIED.



HAVE YOU APPREHENDED THE KILLERS?

YES, AND I HAVE LINDA RILEY IN PROTECTIVE CUSTODY.

DOES THAT NOT SATIATE YOUR ANGER?

YOU TRAINED THOSE MEN, MASTER KIRIGI. DOESN'T ANY OF THIS UPSET YOU?



FOR ME TO BE UPSET WOULD IMPLY SOME MORAL JUDGMENT ON MY PART. YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT.

AFTER ALL, I DID NOT QUESTION YOUR MOTIVES WHEN YOU CAME TO ME.



NO, YOU DIDN'T.

BUT PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE.

END

BAT-SIGNALS

DC COMICS INC.

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L#3506

In this issue, we'll be seeing letters written in response to **BATMAN** #426, also known as the infamous "Death of Robin" issue. Some of your comments have been shortened in order to make room for more of them.

Dear Denny and Company,

You have no doubt received an avalanche of mail on the "A Death in the Family" series which recently ran in **BATMAN**. I look forward to reading the upcoming lettercols to see how extreme the reactions are to this superlative series. I myself have quite a few strong opinions on the aftermath and ramifications of Jason Todd's death, but I shall leave that to my fellow fans. My purpose in writing this time is to offer my services as one of comidom's ranking clergymen. Jason's funeral was so brief (just one panel)? Come on! but the story had to move forward. I hereby offer my own humble reflections had I been officiating at Jason's funeral.

REQUIEM FOR A ROBIN

"The just man, though he die early, shall be at rest. For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years ... Having become perfect in a short while, he reached the fullness of a long career, for his soul was pleasing to the Lord. Therefore, God sped him out of the midst of wickedness. But the people saw and did not understand, nor did they take this into account." — the Book of Wisdom 4:7-8, 13-14

My dear friends, we gather here in a stunned and painful silence. Death is already such a dumbfounding mystery, but is accepted as a part of the normal cycle of life. Yet, what can one say upon the death of someone so young, someone so seemingly innocent, someone who was so full of the vigor of life? As the Scripture says, "We see, but we do not understand."

Jason Todd was an extraordinary young man. Deprived of any semblance of a normal family life, Jason somehow survived. Thinking his parents dead, Jason survived on his own. In this he showed his commitment to living. Perhaps justifiably bitter at what society had dealt him, Jason was fortunate enough to channel his anger in a more positive way. Thanks to Mr. Wayne's loving concern and attention, Jason finally found a way to not only survive, but to live life to the fullest.

But the exhilaration of being Robin too soon took a back seat to Jason's overriding need for parental love. What happened to his parents? Who was his

mother? Jason had to know. Perhaps the ghosts of his shadowy past obstructed his commitment as a crime fighter. In retrospect, who can really fault him for this, in light of the glimmer of possibility that his mother might still be alive?

Jason Todd's life was tragically short. But he accomplished more in his youthful years than most of us may ever accomplish in a long lifetime. Jason wanted the truth. Jason wanted his parents' love. Life doesn't get more basic than that. Having found both the truth and his mother, Jason was not about to let these be snatched away from him again. Jason's whole life found meaning and fulfillment when he finally found his mother. Even the face of death could not crush the power of Jason's love.

Jason did good. Our faith tells us that he is now united with his parents forever in the Lord. Still, those of us left behind must sort out our grief and our feelings. Though we will certainly miss Jason, we know his enthusiasm for life and his independent spirit will always be alive in us. May we all someday find the fulfillment that Jason found in his young life.

Rest in peace, Jason Todd. More than we may ever fully acknowledge, you were the greatest Robin of all.

Sincerely in the Spirit,
 Father Ken Canedo
 Pastor
 St. Benedict Parish
 for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired
 2869 Bush Street
 San Francisco, CA 94115

Thank you as always, Father Ken.

.....

To Jim Starlin and Company,

I have been reading comic books for 43 years (I am 50 now). Before **BATMAN** #426 I had never cried over a comic book; I never expect to again. Need I say more?

Except, thank you.

Steve Young
 Knoxville, TN

P.S. Also the first letter I've ever written to a comic since I was twelve.

.....

People,

... you murderers ...

Lon Wolf
 2118 Ryan's Run East
 Maple Shade, NJ 08052

.....

Hello Batty Freaks!

HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI
 HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI HAI

Joker! Joker is the new Iranian Ambassador to the U.N.!? HAI HAI HAI HAI! It's absolutely the best joke of the month!

When Superman made that funny face in panel one, and said that there was going to be a new Ambassador to the UN in panel two on page 19, I knew it had to be ... The Joker. As for that delicious "WHOPPER" of a knuckle sandwich in panel four, page 20, HIP HIP HORRAY! Batman finally got what he was looking for ... the pain of the day (that is, after the pain of Jason Todd's death).

I for one have to admit that I voted for Jason Todd to be killed so that we could see Batman wallow in self-pity. But the big reason for voting that Jason Todd kick the bucket, was to see the damn Joker killed as well. If I were the Batman (let's thank the Lord I'm not), even though he follows the law a lot, I'd go and give the Joker a very painful death.

That's all for now. See you in thirty!

Wilson Aguilar
 CBI Club
 5307 W. 22nd Place
 Cicero, IL 60650

.....

Dear Denny,

Recently, there was a poll in a San Francisco newspaper. The question: "Should Joe Montana leave the San Francisco 49ers and retire?" The popular opinion was that Montana is getting too old and has sustained too many injuries to continue to be an effective quarterback. Following this poll, reporters converged upon 49er head coach Bill Walsh, asking him what was going to happen to Montana, since the 49ers' fans seemed to want him off the team.

Walsh said (and I'm paraphrasing here), "Nothing. Whether Joe stays on the team is a question between Joe and me. The fans really have nothing to say on this matter, and my attitudes aren't changed one bit by this poll."

I'm writing to express my great dissatisfaction with your recent "Should Robin die?" campaign. As a loyal reader of your comics and a great admirer of your writing and plotting abilities, I am outraged that you would let a poll of fandom determine whether a character like Robin should survive.

First, this campaign stinks of a cheap attempt to get publicity for your comics. With Batman's fiftieth anniversary coming up, was this whole thing really necessary? But this isn't my main gripe.

Second, dramatically, Batman needs a Robin. Robin shows us the youth of Bat-

man, what Batman himself might have been like as a child if he had had a father figure. This isn't really my main gripe either.

The most grievous wrong committed in this whole affair (and this is my main gripe) is one of forgetting your places as the creative minds behind an ever-evolving story. Letting your fans decide the course of your characters' destinies is wrong. When I read BATMAN comics (or any other comics, or watch a TV show, or read a novel, or see an opera, or whatever), I like to pretend that I'm watching actual events in some other kind of bizarre reality (in the case of BATMAN comics, it's the reality of four-color two-dimensional newsprint). To crank out comics to suit the whims of your readers is not only artistically unethical, it reinforces the notion that these characters and situations are fictitious. The illusion of reality is destroyed. The reader is left thinking "So what?" instead of "Robin's dead!" What should have been a dramatic surprise was turned into a game of "Is he or isn't he?"

Finally, this vote seems to indicate that you yourselves don't take your stories seriously. It's a story of Batman vs. Joker, with two different disposable endings. In one, Robin dies; in the other, he lives. It's immaterial; it's just a sidebar to the rest of the story. In the course of writing the story, Robin's life doesn't matter one way or the other.

Of course you fans should be allowed their input. Of course you should take their suggestions to heart. But the decisions should be yours. Don't reduce your decisions to a question of "Well, guys, what do we do now?"

When given a choice—should Robin die, or not—your fans were, in effect, forced to make a decision one way or the other. If you had had a third 900 line, for "Do whatever's dramatically best," I'm sure it would have gotten the most votes. I am strongly of the opinion that Robin's fate is not in the hands of the fans. Frankly, it's none of their business! You're the ones who create the BATMAN legend. You guys plot the courses of these characters' lives. It is in your power to turn Robin into a character we all can like and root for.

Can you imagine what would have happened to, say, *Star Trek*, if creative control were turned over to its fans? We would have seen no death of Mr. Spock, no destruction of the starship Enterprise, no comedy hijinks in *Star Trek IV*, and no *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. All of these ideas were greatly opposed by *Star Trek* fandom, yet all ultimately served to push the *Star Trek* legend forward. In BATMAN, you've set a nasty precedent for letting the fans have whatever they want, instead of doing what's best for the BATMAN legend.

Finally, may I mention that I never knew about the 900 numbers until after the "Robin dies" issue came out. (See, I buy so many comics that it gets confusing to me to read them all as they come out, so I save my comics until the concluding chapter of every multi-part story comes out, so I can read the whole story in one sitting without getting confused. I still

haven't read "A Death in the Family," because Part Four hasn't come out yet. I learned of Robin's death—and your election/publicity play—from a fanboy in my local comics store who couldn't keep his mouth shut.) I didn't get a chance to vote. How many other fans didn't get a chance to vote? I read in the newspaper that the vote was actually very close, that fandom was basically split 50-50. You've let a trivial majority determine the fate of what could have been a dynamic, controversial character.

Please, don't ever, ever do this again. Don't ever forget who's in charge of your characters' destinies.

Right On,
Doug Clark
1355 Hayne Rd.
Hillsborough, CA 94010
.....

Hey Dan—

After reading BATMAN #426, my faith in both democracy and the telephone network has really been justified.

But what will you do for an encore?

Uncle Elvis
17650 Dawson Road
Dawson Springs, KY 42408

An encore, Unc? Well, since you asked...

Next issue (#432), JAMES OWSLEY will provide another roller-coaster thriller for

From the Den



Forgive me. Everything's jumbled. I've just moved across the river here to Brooklyn a few days ago, after living in one apartment in the Soho area of lower Manhattan for 17 years. I'm surrounded by the dozens of cardboard boxes we haven't yet had time to unpack and miscellaneous pieces of furniture at odd angles. The telephone won't be installed until the end of the week. The desk I'm working at is jury-rigged; I don't have the wood screws to put it together properly. The air is scented with the smell of fresh paint. The floors are fresh and varnished and unscuffed. I can hear a dishwasher chugging a room away—I've never owned a dishwasher before—and I can't hear yells and car horns and sirens—the cacophony that is such an integral part of my old street. I hadn't noticed it in years; this neighborhood is quiet. To my right, there is a glass door that opens onto a brick patio and grass—a back yard; I haven't had access to a back yard since I moved to New York in 1965.

The other night, I had to search for some place that would sell me a loaf of bread. There aren't three all-night delis within five minutes' walk, as there were in Soho. I haven't seen any bookstores yet, either. Nor any store that sells the multigrain pancake mix I like, nor the oat bran I use in baking breakfast muffins. Oh, and the worst: there are no newspaper vendors nearby. I'll have to have my morning coffee without the *Times*, and that will be difficult.

JIM APARO to pencil entitled "Dead Letter Office." In this second of Owsley's two Bat stories, *The World's Greatest Detective* will more than earn that grandiose sobriquet. Then, how about a three-issue spectacular called "The Many Deaths of the Batman," written by JOHN BYRNE, pencilled by JIM APARO, and inked by MIKE DeCARLO. Starting in BATMAN #433 and continuing until #435, Byrne will be summoning up and knocking down a lot of Bat-history. And meanwhile, over in our sister book, DETECTIVE COMICS, we'll be celebrating FIFTY YEARS of Batman in print with the first part of another three-part saga called *Blind Justice*. It's a 61-page story, with a ton of additional pin-ups and quotations from some of the best artists and writers working today that we could get our hands on. Part One of this soon-to-be-epic goes on sale at the end of February.

How's that for an encore?

And if that isn't enough... well, check this space next month for more information about what we have planned for the Year of the Batman.

And the stuff just keeps getting better. That's the strange part, if you ask me. Not to put our guys on the back too much or anything... but they must be doing something right.

Later.

—Dan Raspler
Assistant Editor

But the sidewalk out front is covered with leaves, because the street is lined with trees. I saw a squirrel. Children live next door.

It will take getting used to, this quiet place across the river. Manhattan is an arena of mad energy; Brooklyn is somewhere people go to live.

Just now, I'd rather think about Brooklyn, and my new life style, and the adjustments I'm being forced to make, than my work. For the past week, we've been dealing with the consequences of our "death of Robin" sequence in BATMAN. I expected a reaction. I didn't expect this reaction. It is a heady feeling to see yourself quoted in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal* and almost every major newspaper in the country; to be sought after by radio and television personalities; to hear your own voice coming from the sources that carry the voices of presidents and prime ministers. But it is also disconcerting. My sense of proportion is distorted, my reality a bit warped; nothing I've been involved in seems worth this tumult.

The consequence of it all is that eventually I'll have to reevaluate what we do here at DC. But I'm not ready yet. Maybe when I'm settled in, and the boxes are unpacked, the rooms orderly, the telephone hanging on the wall. When I've learned where to find bread late at night. When I've gotten used to not reading the *Times* in the morning. Maybe then I'll be able to sort everything out, put it in perspective, live with it. But not now. Not yet.

DENNY